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Eleventh meeting of chairpersons
of the human rights treaty bodies
Geneva, 31 May-4 June 1999

PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND ANNOTATIONS

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The 11th meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies will be held from 31 May to 4 June 1999, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/178 of 23 December 1994, in which the Secretary-General was requested to finance, as of 1995, annual meetings of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies. Prior to their meeting in 1995, the chairpersons had met for the first time in 1984 and biannually from 1988 until 1994.

2. The present document, which was prepared in consultation with the chairpersons, contains the provisional agenda for their 11th meeting, together with annotations relating thereto.

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PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting and election of officers.

2. Adoption of the agenda.

3. Organizational and other matters.

4. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies.

5. Cooperation of human rights treaty bodies with United Nations departments, specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms.

6. Universal ratification.

7. Improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies:

   (a) Regional sessions;

   (b) Technical briefings;

   (c) Specific measures to enhance cooperation between treaty bodies.

8. Draft plan of action for strengthening the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

9. Servicing of the treaty bodies.

10. Reservations to the human rights treaties.

11. Right to education.

12. Establishment of indicators/benchmarks to assess the realization of human rights.

13. Informal consultation with governments.

14. Adoption of report.

ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Item 1. Opening of the meeting and election of officers

The meeting will convene at the United Nations Office at Geneva on Monday, 31 May 1999, at 10 a.m.

Item 2. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting will adopt its agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda contained in the present document.

Item 3. Organizational and other matters

Under this agenda item, the meeting will consider and adopt a programme of work.

Item 4. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies

The Chairperson of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights, Ms. Anne Anderson, and the Chairperson of the fiftieth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Mr. El Hadji Guissé, are invited to address the chairpersons on the relationship between the work of the treaty bodies and the bodies which they represent, in accordance with the practice established at previous meetings.

The chairpersons may wish to present briefly the activities of the treaty body they represent, as well as its working methods, new developments or decisions and challenges. Pursuant to a recommendation adopted at their 8th meeting (see A/52/507, annex, para. 73), the chairpersons will have before them an "activities profile" for each committee describing its salient activities over the past year and including relevant statistics.

Item 5. Cooperation of human rights treaty bodies with United Nations departments, specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms

United Nations departments, specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms whose mandates are closely related to the work of the treaty bodies have been invited to be represented at the meeting to exchange views on matters of mutual interest or concern. Information on developments on relations between the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Programme is contained in the report of the secretariat (HRI/MC/1999/3). It may be noted that, at the request of the chairpersons at their 8th, 9th and 10th meetings, the present meeting has been scheduled to coincide with the 6th meeting of special rapporteurs/representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups to facilitate formal and informal discussions designed to coordinate in a more effective manner the activities of the two groups (see A/52/507, annex, para. 50; A/53/125, annex, para. 44; A/53/432, annex, para. 15). The chairperson of the meeting of special rapporteurs/representatives, experts and chairpersons of

working groups will be invited to address the chairpersons on the relationship between their work and that of treaty bodies and time will be reserved for a joint meeting of the two full groups of experts.

Item 6. Universal ratification

The chairpersons at their 10th meeting recommended that OHCHR develop a concerted and comprehensive action programme to promote universal ratification in cooperation with specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes, in particular UNDP, and to report to them at their 11th meeting on the action taken in this regard (see A/53/432, annex, para. 58). Information on this subject is contained in the report of the secretariat (HRI/MC/1999/3).

Item 7. Improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies

(a) Regional sessions

At their 10th meeting, the chairpersons requested that necessary steps be taken to enable the four human rights treaty bodies meeting only in Geneva to hold occasional sessions in New York and for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to hold sessions in Geneva. They also requested that the treaty bodies be able to meet, on occasion, in other United Nations regional offices (see A/53/432, para. 61). The cost estimates associated with the organization of regional sessions requested by the chairpersons at their 8th meeting is before them (HRI/MC/1999/Misc.1). The chairpersons may wish to consider this item further.

(b) Technical briefings

The chairpersons at their 10th meeting recommended that a programme of technical briefings for committee experts be developed on the basis of the proposal presented by the secretariat during that meeting and incorporating their suggestions (ibid., para. 62). A revised proposal of the secretariat will be presented to the chairpersons for their consideration (HRI/MC/1999/Misc.2).

(c) Specific measures to enhance cooperation between treaty bodies

The chairpersons may wish to consider specific measures to enhance cooperation between treaty bodies. For instance, experts could be invited to attend part of the sessions of other committees when their attendance is relevant for the work of that committee or his or her own. The possibility of conducting joint programmes relating to "shared" rights could also be explored.

Item. 8 Draft plan of action for strengthening the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The chairpersons at their 10th meeting examined a draft plan of action prepared by the secretariat for strengthening the implementation of the above treaties. They requested that the secretariat revise the draft plan, in close consultation with their chairperson, for discussion at the 11th meeting. The revised plan will be before the chairpersons (HRI/MC/1999/Misc.3). In addition, the report of the secretariat on follow-up to the 10th meeting (HRI/MC/1999/3) will contain information on the status of the Plans of Action for strengthening the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which are currently in operation.

Item 9. Servicing of the treaty bodies

On several occasions, the chairpersons have expressed concern at the inadequate staffing situation that had resulted in serious difficulties in the functioning of the treaty bodies, including a heavy backlog in processing communications. The chairpersons will have information in the report of the secretariat (HRI/MC/1999/3) on the outlook for the servicing of the treaty bodies in the forthcoming 2000-2001 biennium.

Item 10. Reservations to the human rights treaties

The chairpersons may wish to continue their discussion of the preliminary conclusions adopted by the International Law Commission at its forty-seventh session relating to reservations to normative multilateral treaties, including human rights treaties. At their 10th meeting, the chairpersons agreed to pursue the consideration of the preliminary conclusions in their respective committees with a view to formulating their comments and forwarding them to the International Law Commission as soon as possible (ibid., para. 52). The chairpersons will have before them those preliminary conclusions.

Item 11. Right to education

During its day of general discussion on the right to education, held during its nineteenth session in December 1998, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights proposed that a workshop be held on the subject of indicators for the right to education. The proposal for the workshop, which is envisioned as a cooperative enterprise of the treaty bodies, will be presented by the Chairperson of the Committee. The chairpersons will have before them the summary records of the day of general discussion (E/C.12/1999/SR.49 and 50).

Item 12. Establishment of indicators/benchmarks to assess the realization of human rights

In recent years, there have been growing calls for the establishment of indicators and benchmarks to assess the realization of human rights. The chairpersons will have before them a background paper prepared by the secretariat on this issue.

Item 13. Informal consultation with governments

Following the experience of the 9th and 10th meetings, where the chairpersons engaged in a fruitful dialogue with representatives of States parties of the the human rights treaties on the work of the treaty bodies and on their reform, States parties are invited to send representatives to continue their dialogue with the chairpersons on the afternoon of 3 June 1999 (date subject to confirmation).

Item 14. Adoption of report

The chairpersons will adopt a report on their meeting, including conclusions and recommendations, to be submitted to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/138.

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